DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 897 PS 029 122

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TITLE	Openness in Adoption: Exploring Family Connections.
ISBN	ISBN-0-8039-5779-3
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	229p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Sage Publications, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320. Tel: 805-499-0721; Fax: 805-499-0871; Web site: http://www.sagepub.com; e-mail: info@sagepub.com ($34.95).
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Collected Works - General (020)
EDRS PRICE	Document Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adoption; *Adoptive Parents; Agency Role; *Biological Parents; *Childhood Attitudes; *Parent Attitudes; Public Policy; Research Needs; Social Change
IDENTIFIERS	*Open Adoption

ABSTRACT

Noting social and demographic changes provoking a trend toward openness in adoption practice, this book presents the findings from a nationwide study examining the impact of variations in openness in adoption on participants in the adoptive kinship network: adopted children, adoptive parents, and the children's birth parents. The first chapter of the book examines the issues, debates, and evidence to date concerning openness in adoption. The second chapter presents an initial study of adoption practice at 35 agencies in 15 states, showing that between 1987 and 1993, agencies offered a continuum of open adoption, from confidential to fully disclosed. The third chapter details the methodology of the main study, in which adoptive families and birth mothers were recruited through the 35 agencies and interviewed. Four major categories were used to differentiate among levels of openness: confidential, time-limited mediated, ongoing mediated, and fully disclosed. The next three chapters present outcomes of the varying degrees of openness on the children, adoptive parents' perspectives on their roles and relationships with birth parents, and birth mothers' adjustment and resolution of grief. The seventh chapter puts the preceding perspectives together to focus on the dynamics of relationships within the adoptive kinship network, which is composed of the adopted child, adoptive immediate and extended family, and birth immediate and extended family. The final chapter offers general conclusions and implications, including the following: (1) The movement toward openness in adoption has taken place within the context of broader societal changes; (2) Many of the fears and concerns initially raised about openness in adoption appear to be unfounded; (3) The level of openness in adoption should be decided on a case-by-case basis; (4) Adoption should be viewed as an ongoing process, rather than as a discrete event in time; (5) Although the role of adoption agencies has changed dramatically in recent years, agency staff still have profound effects on the adoptive placements they facilitate; and (6) As families have new experiences with adoption, new questions arise that provoke further consideration. Implications for adoption practice, public policy, and future research are explored. (Contains 152 references.) (HTH)

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